

The worm, the comb, and the great 123
Are mine alone!

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STEP how Byron turned to see his foot
when he was born
and clubbed by life CHICAGO
LADDER he still would sport on a
~~black and blue~~

though time has killed the dream
(not healed)

closed the day away
though spring renews itself each year:

There is no need,

no reason and no rhyme

I get my fill from foul weather
bestly cold endless showers

~~sharpen~~ ^{whet} my appetite

the humid spathy of deep despair
the afternoons for slow rattling
yet curious how Byron turned
choked in shallow thin-coated wear

yet curious (how)

~~Byron choked in shallow thin-coated wear~~

Byron turned to see

The Journal of the Bookfellows

though clubbed by life
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he still would sport on it

→ the humid spathy of deep despair
choked in shallow thin-coated wear

THE STEP LADDER was originally published by the Order of Bookfellows, founded in 1919 by George Steele Seymour and Flora Warren Seymour for the purpose of promoting the love of good books and encouraging good writers. This was a work to which the Seymours gave their great personal warmth and devotion. The major part of their activity was the publication of a literary journal which provided an outlet for good writers, known or unknown. Knox College, representing the Bookfellow Foundation, now continues their dedicated work.

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Cover: worksheet for *Lord Byron* by Peter Spielberg, p. 7.

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The STEP LADDER

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VIRGINIA BRADY YOUNG

FORTY DAYS OF SNOW

After forty days of snow
she sets aside her mending
for orange of a robin blending
with the hills. Her heart fills
with song robins have been singing
since the Ark. The dark of winter nights
clings still. Robin's carolling
to her is like to him his wings.
High on a neighbor's hill
she sees the last blanch of snow
and smiles as Noah did
when dove flew back with olive branch.

CASUALTY AT RE-ENTRY

Design for seeing! let a man see
past the flesh-sealed
and at parameters of capacity!

What irony
if, space-spent, he be struck
by a titan-whip

of gravity.
and vision (shimmering, salmon-bright field,
dropping all images)

become bloody pits,
Oedipal pits (the mask of luck
and right-reason falls)

as he falls,
as earth rises, mothering,
leading him in old design,

corded and fettering
— earth watching him gently,
earth blindly kind.

SCIENTISTS ARE POETS, TOO

Revealers, too. And brothers to me.

For I, looking in, believe them as devout
and as anxious as I, as staunchly they look out.
Subverters of their own serenity,
tapping at nature, a little they hold
against space-sea of mystery.

"In our age there is neither space nor time
but only space-time curved about the stars."
Einstein's words. To me they recall
obsessive cave of place and time
where old desires
leap to get through
sword-flames of the self-wall.

I have seen the creative ingrown in creation
and men regressing, hiding deep in the cave.
Essentially homeless, are we,
like Leibnitz's monads, ever
caved in isolation,
windowless, doorless —
awaiting the grave?

Even as Newton fancied himself as a boy
playing with truth — where truth tides in

SAM BRADLEY

"all undiscovered," so we employ
half childplay in mature delight.
Sand-caves, and rooms in the soul,
await a tide. And each sea-wall tells
of will to measure aright.

Encoved, we watch the waves roll,
breaking sand-walls. Who build here must be
brothers to me.

DOROTHY REBENTISCH

COR NE EDITO

Let not thy sorrow
eat out thy heart;
but let it be the whetstone
that can impart
a keen edge to the knife of wit.

THE LOST CAVE

In a lost cave of mankind's mind
stalactites and stalagmites brood
in icy slience.

(The truth goading.)

A flowing trickle fills a pool of reason
subservient to man's inclination,
dependent on desire.

Seeking vendettas,
lacking self-discipline,
or acquiescing to another's will,
he disregards his inner reproof
and makes morality
a patch-up bastard of
megalomania and bigotry.

HOW SHALL I CONTINUE?

how shall I continue
when
I am from love forever severed
how shall I

in the dying fall
let me bury my flesh in yours

and in that castle
lock the fire
that none shall heighten
with their breath
but beat their swords
to sand their souls to rust.

LORD BYRON

"though spring renews itself each year
I get my fill from foul weather
beastly cold
and endless showers
whet my appetite
 with deep despair
 wrapped in shallow thin coated wear"

yet,
curious (how)
Byron turned to see
 his foot when he was born
and clubbed by life
he still would sport in it.

ON SUCH A DAY IN SPRING

Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer.

— Mallarmé

They come like Flowering Quince,
Like early Peach;
They patter winds of spring
With laughing speech;
Their eyes —
Blue hyacinths — reflect the skies,
Or, moist and dark,
Are willow bark.

Caught in fillets of young-girl hair,
The sun flames aureoles through the air.

On such a day of dappledness
As this,
Blossoming, pink-and-white, genus-sprite
Girls reveal
Intangibles of loveliness
Embodied in the real.

UNDER THE BRIDGE

Who will hear
The discourse of water
On pebble and stone?
Who will listen
For alternate voices
For rise and fall of liquid cadence
For fluid phrase
And the drowned word?
 Foot steps rattle the floor of the bridge,
 Foot steps crackle dry leaves
 In the distance,
 A traveler
 Unaware
 Continues his journey
The waters
Continue
Their long conversations.

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

for Liz

Poised in unread rooms alone she held
The heavy shadows of the moon together
Learning to pose for her picture of the world,
And jewels like men at her marvelous wrist
Lie turned and do honor in this light.

Be patient if the rain attract her face
Against the window; learn her rain
Is a blue wave about to break at her hand;
And enjoy the shadowed cheeks
To know her apple dreams, the laughing boys
Who steal their way into her trees.

Allowing for mistakes, deploy the smile
Between the darkest edge of pain,
And do not paint too elegant:
Remember that this lady is beyond
Your scope, that spiders spin their story
To the cold, and know your subtle hand
Is after all too slow and far too bold.

THE OWL

I contemplate an owl
And wonder
Now how wisely
He has mastered night
Around his tree.
I know that fathers, scholars,
And histories cannot be wise,
And so, I watch the owl
Spurn my rise
To touch its long departure
From the earth into the sky.
I do not think
He waits for me
To stand beneath
Another night, yet
I go off to see.

FROM EASTERN WINDOW

Plants surround me, and outside
birds sing, sing in the struggling
cloud-sunlight. I've little else
left to love but these plants, and
repetitious bird-song from the field.

From eastern window
I see the tall bamboo glinting with drops
of recent rain. I said in poems
that we loved it together, but I lied:
you died before it was planted, before
I came to live near this garden.

You have been gone ten years. I grow
older, and have my plants, coleus,
neftitis, philodendron about my chair;
a few flowers . . . and fewer thoughts of you,
for time erases more than the poets admit.
The bamboo shivers under the wind-touched
light, and a bird cries, cries

O my loved girl, I am remembering again
the nights of our lying and listening
above the great grove of bamboo,
and the moonlight washing our world.

THE INTERRUPTION

I try to read poems, but the children
shout in the road, and cry and complain.
It has been a long summer. It has been
exceedingly hot and dry.

We are more used to the rain:
rain that comes down for days, sometimes for weeks.
Nearly two months is too long for the hammers of sun
to beat on our earth.

So the hot children quarrel. Dust drifts
in the slight, hot wind. Flowers wilt.
Suddenly, for some unknown reason,
the children are quiet. A car starts,
taking them, perhaps, to where there is water.
I resume reading poems.

EVEN AS ADAM

I digest my sour crust of miscreant earth
in locust-shrilling days before the seventh angel
trumpets the inevitable holocaust,
bearing witness, "It is done!"

Yet I faintly remember the beautiful garden
denied me forever by the seraphs' flaming swords,
sealing its gates with adamantine fire.
Hopelessly I pray a millennium of peace,
defying slithering warmongers
whose rattlesnake tongues and pushbutton deaths
prostitute the frivolous world,
that harlot flirting with Armageddon.

Under the fallout in the twilight of my time,
yea, I stare longingly into the darkness,
hungering light in the approach of extinction
couched on cinders under obliterated stars.

SEA THIRST

Kneeled on the shore and saw a bathingsuited woman,
hair like a brace of snakes
around the blankness wetness of her face,
Her fingers anchored with a mockery of peril
into the transient sands.

Kneeled on the shore and saw
a drowned diluvial mermaid stretched
for the urgent gulls to peck,
Knew my private air corrupted by a thirsty sea —
whose fork of foam had missed its mouth
and tossed to my tears a wife.

SILENCES OF STONE

I do not marvel at the silences of stone
Now that these silences are mine:
The mute lament, the weighted waters
Noiseless on my shore.

I do not wonder at waves
Grinding granite to sand,
While marshes of mind
Harden to rock.

Being part water, stone,
The stone, the sea of me
Remembers fossil shells in ocean beds,
And ice sheets scorching fire-formed rocks.

Because I have known silences of stone,
All lips are lutes of stillness,
All tongues stiffen to stone.

FROZEN WORDS

If all the frozen words
Suspended in space
Could suddenly melt,
Then would return to earth
From darkened skies
Words that blossomed in cold air,
Crystal clear as frosty icicles,
Shining, chilled syllables,
Vowels liquified to vapor.
Pendulous phrases
Thaw in April air,
Descend as dew,
Dissolve into grey mist.
Soft, measured words,
Friendly words
Fringed with kindness—
The sound of words falling
Into fields, lakes and rivers
Cannot be heard.
The sound of well-remembered words
Is the spray of the seas,
Is vapor, fog and mist.

LONG VOYAGE

Bluebird
rising above fields
like eyes lifting,
or a song moving
around worlds
on perpetual voyage.

Drake
loved a meadow
near Plymouth
at the end of
a long voyage.

I see
a live snail
touching a wisp
of wheat,
and the stones
of a path
where it ends.

THE DANCE

A cold day comes, world spins around,
turning into the thickening mist of fall,
sun reddens afternoons, a blazing tail
wags on horizons, flaming apricots
settle in golden bowls. We
await the ones who call.

Tyrannosaur sits on a dying star,
chilled smoke ascends the slope of Alioth;
violinist ticks thin strings—
notes fly like gnats across obscure salons,
slinking like yellow bats at silver ball.

Sweet ladies lie unseasonably in bed
covered with jagging wool from foot to head
while lovers dance with silken ones instead.

THE SEEKER

Why do you search,
Fierce hunter,
The night and tempest sky?

I seek a star
To fire the match
I light my candle by.

You want a fire
To bound your hearth,
Keep out old terror's cry?

The flame I seek
Will only show
The wound of which I die.

LET US SIT DOWN

Let us sit down
And be content
With every event.

There is
No season
For the fury
Of reason.

This world
Has a logic
Beyond our
Arithmetic.

What is plausible
Soon becomes
Impossible.

Let us sit down
And be content
With every event.

CAVILLERS AND CARPERS

Twylegged disposalls
gulping grapes
from the skin in
subjugate
that which is fresh,
and discipline
the zest for life.

In conformity,
with platitudes
and hackneyed phrase,
these sober-sides
would moth ball
any quarrel
with the norm.

Aghast at footprints
on the beach,
they pass the lamp
from hand to mouth,
and drum the clew
before
they catch its name.

BORN OF BRIEFNESS

nothing endures
in feminine land.
Desire has had me.

Kneading love for
bread, now I know
how bagpipes feel.

NIGHT THE DARK SWAN

Night the dark swan, descending swiftly found
the lonely woman, covering her breast.
Overwhelmed by fearful joy, sighing she swooned
in feathery oblivion till dawn
blew out the stars and snuffed a feeble moon.
And then— aware of flight, she roused, dismayed
to find her heart burdened with wild unrest,
a Leda whom divinity betrayed.

RABBITS SAID THE KING

"Rabbits," said the king, "are fiercer than I am because
they have claws.

They are smarter than I am since every day
they run away.

Rabbits than me have infinite more common sense,
for they dispense
with the trivial.

They eat, sleep, populate,
dance in the moonlight, drift in the dew-dawn,
and are Easter's jester."

The king envied rabbits.

COLOR CONTRAST

The sombre heron
Draws back twin landing gear,
Circles above saffron
Cattle in cypress groves, veers
Into space — free — beyond tall tupelo.

Through gilded air,
Through checkered shadow,
Vivid plumage of rare
Makaw gleams red, green, yellow—
Chained, among the ripening tangelo.

FROM THIS BOX I SPEAK

These crushed colors have seamed into
my small white core
locked in mute blackness.

Like a larva sick of silk
I long to kick this fossiled light
back to its muscled
parts.

Oh, split, split me out—
send me
back to my cupped blue,
the flowing hair of purple,
the orange window I could open.
Arrow this hard white core of me
taut on your bow.
Spin me through blood and water.
Oh, crash me!
Crash me again
to color!

THE ROYAL SHED

Why is this emperor haunting the shed,
Like a festive coalman?
I tell him emperors must delight in palaces, and rule,
Not be phantoms.
But only anthems,
Like the surge of voices at Coronation
Answer,
As the old shed's belfry peals.

THE BROKEN BUG ASKS

A sordid bug on a wrack
Cracks.
Who will fathom his disfigurements?
For he is an alive and walking,
Quite gay and limping
Broken crustacean
Who nevertheless
Needs some explanation.

Contributors

Virginia Brady Young is the wife of a Professor of Psychology at Colgate University. Mrs. Young has published widely in many magazines. Besides her interest in poetry, she is presently Assistant to the Director of the Colgate Foreign Policy Conference. **Sam Bradley** is an editor of *Approach*. A Quaker, he began his writing career with religious poetry, and it is still his major interest. He has appeared in the past year, or will shortly appear, in some two dozen periodicals, including *Perspective*, *Shenandoah*, *The University of Kansas City Review*, and others.

Mary Child comes to poetry from music. Her career as a soprano and teacher of voice was interrupted by deafness in 1935. She has been writing poetry since 1951. **Richard Kelly**, 21, is a senior at City College of New York. He has had poems in *Prairie Schooner*, *New Orleans Poetry Journal* and several other magazines, and will have a poem in the forthcoming *Braithwaite Anthology of Magazine Verse 1958*. He is the editor of a new magazine, *The Half Moon*, which will appear this summer. **Alfred Leland Mooney** has taught in Duquesne High School for 31 years and at present has three classes in creative writing. **Dean Chase**, after two years of college, six years in the Army, and four years on the Southern Pacific Railroad, is now clerking in a luggage store. "My life the past year and a half," he writes, "has been immersed in reading, writing, hearing, studying poetry to the exclusion of nearly everything else."

Ryah Tumarkin Goodman was born in Russia and came to this country at the age of four. She has composed music for many of her poems. Her work has appeared in *The Saturday Review*, *The Atlantic*, *Epoch*, and several other magazines. In 1952, her book, *Toward the Sun*, was published by Bruce Humphries. **James Binney** is a professor of English at West Chester State College, Pennsylvania, where he teaches writing. His stories, articles, and poems have appeared in many magazines. **Lorna Beers** has published five novels, three for adults (the first of which won a Hopwood Award at the University of Michigan), and two for children. In the past year she has begun writing stories and poetry. One of her stories will appear in *The Literary Review*, another in *Harper's*. She has also had poems accepted in several places.

The years **Charles Angoff** spent working with Mencken on *The American Mercury* are the subject of his *H. L. Mencken: A Portrait from Memory*. He has recently published *Between Dark and Day*, the fourth novel in a tetralogy dealing with the life of the Jew in America. Mr. Angoff is also co-editor of *The Literary Review*. **Jimm Dakin** began work as a machinist, and is now "completing a research 'sabbatical' from business." While engaged in these studies, he received the Durham Poetry Award at the University of New Hampshire and award-winning book, *Giant in the Beetle*, was published in 1958.

Jocelyn Macy Sloan has published in many magazines, including *The Beloit Poetry Journal* and *Voices*. Forthcoming are poems of hers in *Whetstone*, *The Humanist*, and *The Literary Review*. She will be guest editor of the Spring issue of *Voices*. Poems by **Jeannette Chappell** have appeared in many magazines, including *The Saturday Review* and *Voices*. She is a Life Member of the Order of Bookfellows and, while she was still an undergraduate at Spence School, it was George Steele Seymour who advised and encouraged her to persevere with her writing and who published a number of her early poems in *THE STEP LADDER*.

Helen Sue Isely has had her poetry published very widely in many kinds of publications including *The Antioch Review*, *The Western Review*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, and *Best Articles and Stories*. **Norris Merchant**, 23, has just completed a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship at the University of California at Berkeley. His appearance in *THE STEP LADDER* is his fifth publication.

Announcements

We take pleasure in announcing the sixth annual competition for the Jeannette Glover Campbell Award beginning in the next issue. This award is given by Jeannette Chappell in memory of her aunt. It is open to all poets appearing in *THE STEP LADDER* and goes to the two best poems printed each year.

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